

Minutes
Local Emergency Coordinating Committee Meeting
March 2, 2023

The meeting was called to order at 5:02 PM by Town Council Chair Lisa Thomas.

Present: Lisa Thomas, Jonathan Hand, Bill Watkins, Ted Opdenbrouw, Ken Boutin, Eric Peterson, Ray Eldridge, Bud Meyers, Jim McLoughlin, Laura Stone

Acceptance of Minutes, February 2, 2023:

A motion to approve the minutes of the February 2, 2023 meeting was made by Bud Meyers and seconded by Jim McLoughlin. The following correction was requested:

- Page 2, last bullet at bottom of page, 5th sentence from bottom: Change “She shared” to “He shared.”

The motion to accept the minutes as corrected carried on unanimous vote.

Audience of Citizens: None.

Department Updates:

Public Works – Bill Watkins:

- The recent wind event took down a handful of trees last week. It was nothing major, and has been handled. We had another snow event this week with snowfall of 5-6 inches. 125 tons of salt was used. Overall the winter has been mild.
- Bill attended an RESF meeting, working with DEMHS Region 4 to put together training for debris management. They are aiming for June – one session in the north, and one in the south. He will share info when known. They provided an updated map of shared assets. Next month in May we will be looking at recommendations for equipment to purchase. Bill is recommending a towable generator. We repaired our electronic messaging board and lent it to Columbia. It came back broken. DEMHS will use their repair money to fix it. It’s a finicky piece of equipment and every time it moves, it breaks. It is getting picked up tomorrow. We are also going to look at replacing that with a newer style that is smaller and a lot better.
- Tree work is ongoing. We are waiting on Distinctive Tree to come in for the large project of over 100 trees on Wrights Mill and Nathan Hale Road. Tree complaints keep coming in – we are basically out of funding. We are hoping winter finishes up easy and we can transfer some winter salt money to tree removal.

Police Department – Eric Peterson:

- We have recruitment open until 4/1 for a certified and non-certified officer. We have about 6 candidates. We anticipate Kevin Vail’s retirement in April.
- We are conducting normal training sessions.
- We are not currently experiencing too many problems with overtime and shift coverage.

CERT Team Reestablishment – Ray Eldridge:

- We are working with a person who wants to be part of the Coventry CERT team. He worked on a flyer for us. If approved, we will get it out on social media and other outlets.

- We got some info from Mike Caplet on funding – he will help us on items we have trouble with.
- We talked with Eversource on what training they can do, and there are two – electrical safety and gas services.
- The Chief of Tolland CERT is also willing to do some training for us. Bud Meyers noted that Andover used to have a CERT person too. Jim McLoughlin said we would like to reach out to the old roster of people who were registered in Coventry. We will also work with DEMHS to get clothing and backpacks, etc. Two grants are available: one for equipment and one for training. Once the basic session is done we can begin to work on specialty items. One of those items is a drone operation. CERT members are covered by Workers Comp. The Red Cross has a class on manning a shelter. Ray has been doing a lot of work behind the scenes. The Tolland person reached out after seeing LECC minutes. Ray noted that the Tolland Chief is going to school to be an emergency management director. He lives in Tolland, and works in Worcester. He wants to be involved. John Elsesser noted that the flyer: talks about a list of duties, but doesn't say how you will use these skills to help in an emergency. He thinks it could be clearer as to what the assignments may include. Jim said that DEMHS Region 4 will be watching us with a view to establishing a regional team. Bud said that Fire Police is a specific designation – traffic control would be better term. Lisa Thomas expressed thanks for putting the flyer together.

Fire Department – Bud Meyers:

- For the month of February we responded to 101 calls consisting of: 46 BLS, 30 ALS, 1 Cardiac arrests for a total of 77 Medical calls, 1 Mutual aid structure fires, 1 Vehicle fire, 2 Brush fires, 5 MVA's, 5 False alarms, 8 Tree & wires and 2 Good intent.
- We also had an additional 244 personnel hours of training and events. We went to the fire school and did our quarterly live fire training in the flashover simulator, and we used the buildings at Creaser Park for Mayday and ventilation training.
- After serving over 1 and a half years Captain Chris Bellantone stepped down, since this is the year of the Captain's position reaching their term lengths. We will be looking to appoint the Captains at the annual dinner in August we are leaving the position vacant.
- We swore in two permanent members, Travis Gilchrist and Sean McCarthy, and added two more probationary members, Chad Hahn and Richard Dennis.
- Radios for the new ET are still on back order and we have started driver training on the ET.
- Nine sets of new gear were ordered; we are looking at purchasing two more.

Emergency Management – Jim McLoughlin:

- We continue to work w/OSHA on compliance. The most recent visit was to the station across the street. We got a list of mostly minor items, and most have been completed. We await the written report. The next step would be to get all items taken care of and schedule another day to have them come to the two sub-stations. This has been a good experience for us and an opportunity to make the stations safer.
- A meeting was held with Ashford, Mansfield, Coventry, Willington, the American Red Cross and Region 4 to discuss the possibility of regional shelter. UConn was not at the table. Lisa asked if they were invited. Jim said no. He asked about it and when corrections are made and we reconvene, UConn will be invited. There are a lot of benefits to having the Red Cross at the table.

One of the things they require is a representative from each municipality at the shelter during the emergency. We are making progress.

- The updated emergency operations plan is due January 1. We added a function that specifically deals with IT. We are working to develop bullet points. Region 4 has a workgroup already meeting, and so does CRCOG. It would behoove us to have somebody lead.
- We attended services for Beth Mancini's mom in New Britain. There was a nice showing from the FD.
- On the 24th of February, the Town celebrated six years of owning the ambulance and running/operating it. We hadn't seen a disposition statement in while, but we finally gotten one and it is 19 pages, \$44k in arrears. Many of those show insurance paid to the patient and those funds not passed through to us. Only a few were minor – on the rest we will be seeking reimbursement. Bud said that the sad thing is, once it goes to collections they take a third.
- Jim and John met w/Eversource to discuss storm response. They brought in two new people. There was not a lot of discussion of rolling brown outs but a lot of talk about a public safety supervisor and pairing up w/our designee. It will be their job to help coordinate and prioritize. We pushed our online sheet again and we are trying to push it into their IT. John said during the last storm we had an issue with the sheet. Jim said when the tree went down on Ripley Hill Rd it took out power to the high school which feeds our phones and internet. DPW and north FD had no phones or internet. We got Mark Owen's manual sheet and started entering it. Mike Cote came in and finished up. So there was a delay initially. The school shut down at 11 and nobody ever told us. Jon Hand noted that word went out to parents at 10:30. John Elsesser said that the schools will not allow Jim to be in their notification system because he is not a parent. They say it is a contractual issue. Lesley Munshower was also not notified – and she runs the after school programs. Both of us were told we had to sign up for TV notifications. We shared a link of closed roads with M&J Bus 5 minutes before they were going out. Ted Opdenbrouw said he and Jimmy had talked about it before – the decision is being made above his pay grade. We are trying to make sure between the two of us that notification gets done, but he had other things on his plate and didn't get to it. He agrees that we need to fix that line of communication.
- Jim, Bud and Jared attended a public relations media relations class. It was good. Highlights included the 95-5 rule for posting: 95% should be feel-good stuff, with 5 percent addressing things like accident reporting. They recommended that the FD and Emergency Management have their own website separate from Town, and when items are published that they go straight to Facebook. They did say we're doing the 95-5 best practice. i.e., our "getting to know you" features. We did another one on Chuck Beecher this week. Another of our members was on a podcast and we plan to share that.
- Jim and Bud have a meeting with EPR to discuss software change for reporting software. The company is being bought out and we have looked at them before and didn't like what we saw. Bud this company is contracted with CRCOG.
- Jim attended a meeting in Colchester with several State legislators, the director of OEMS, etc. addressing issues of increased Medicaid. He took John's testimony and sent it to the listserv for Tolland County Fire Chiefs and asked them to provide the testimony to Sen. Osten. Hopefully we will get some action. A recommendation was made to take OEMS out of Public Health and put it into Public Safety. OEMS tends to get lost with all the public health issues.

Coventry Public Schools – Ted Opendbrouw:

- We got one of the two reunifications agreements back – St. Mary’s is signed. Pastor Nutt from First Congregational is attempting to get a committee together. We don’t anticipate issues; it is just matter of getting to people.
- We had a meeting last week with the Region 4 safety committee – the deadline was pushed back to April 8 which is good.
- Ted attended a Region 4 meeting on putting together regional crisis teams. This is just getting off the ground but there is a lot of interest.
- With Bob Dexter’s promotion to sergeant, we will be getting together with Chief Peterson to see who the school liaison officer will be.

Administration – Laura Stone:

- The spring newsletter will be in homes the week of April 17. Content was due on March 1. It is too late to include the CERT flyer, but we could get that in the April e-blast which will go out on 3/27. Items for the e-blast are due on the 15th.

Town Manager – John Elsesser:

- Working with my intern, we applied for additional BRIC money for the microgrid grant. We got an early heads-up that our \$1.4 million grant has been selected as one of the State set-aside grants out of \$2 million. It has to go to FEMA for approval but this is good news for the microgrid project. It will lower the cost of electricity.
- The Manager’s proposed budget is done. We are still copying and collating. The hearing is next Thursday. Formal copies will be available Monday at the latest. This is not a budget that he likes, and we are not even sure the community will allow. There have been several years of no increases combined with inflation. Major changes are proposed. People expect us to do more but we just don’t have the resources. We are losing a quarter of a mil in State education funding if that happens. We will do the best we can. Community input will be very important. On the spending side, we are way below inflation but we just don’t have it on the revenue side.
- The Memorial Day parade is coming up. The highway permit is approved.
- Softball field #2 is ready to go out to bid next week or the week after.
- Medicaid reimbursement: State Medicaid expenses are reimbursed by the federal government up to a certain point. So if we don’t get reimbursed, the State doesn’t get money. There is a solution to help all the towns in CT with this ambulance crisis. They laid off all the staff that was working with this program. So it’s not as big an increase in the State budget as they’re pretending because they get some of that back – about 70%.
- An ongoing long-term problem has been that there is no cell phone coverage at the Public Works garage. So when Public Works lost Wi-Fi they also lost cellular. Mark Owens had to drive down the road to get phone coverage. We asked Verizon if they could put a booster on our antenna but got no response. Jim said that the town-wide UHF repeater did work. We are working to get it tied into the State Police system. Parts are on order and once they come in we can marry those two system. John said that the FCC also just ruled there are no mandatory land-line requirements for phone providers. This is an issue for fire alarms. Jim said that right now the POTS system is working. We pay for a line. Our equipment isn’t compatible with VOIP. John said

we are starting to explore newer technology. T-Mobile has a new product. Their coverage in town isn't bad – and they are on the top of our tower here.

Town Council – Lisa Thomas:

Thanks to all who took the time to speak with Randi Frank to help with the Town Manager search.

Another public forum on Zoom will be held in a couple of weeks.

COVID – John Elsesser:

The numbers are a little better the last couple of weeks. Jim noted that the government has picked a day in May to declare the end of the emergency, from a pandemic state back to a normal state.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 PM on a motion by Bud Meyers, seconded by Jonathan Hand and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone